

The Purpose and Importance of The Sunday Assembly in The Lives of God's People



Thrust Statement: God does not want His people to neglect the gathering of His saints on Sundays.

Scripture Reading: [Hebrews 10:19-26](#)

Is it necessary for God's people to assemble on the Lord's Day? Is it a take it or leave it proposition. Is Sunday just another day of the week without any spiritual significance? What does Sunday mean to you? What is your custom when it comes to the Sunday gatherings of the church? Are you familiar with [Hebrews 10:25](#)? This text of Scripture is one of the most often cited verses to encourage God's people to assemble together as a corporate body to praise God and to encourage one another in the faith. In spite of what God's Word says about neglecting the assembly, yet, many today, as in the first century, frequently miss the Sunday meeting with the saints. Does it bother you to fail to get together with the church on Sunday morning? Do you regularly fail to assemble with the saints on Sunday morning? One quickly observes from the context of [Hebrews 10](#) that some Christians were deserting this gathering of the saints. From this account of the early church, one notices that some believers were abandoning the assembly for fear of persecution for their faith in Jesus as God's one and only way of salvation. Was the threat of incarceration and confiscation of property sufficient reasons for neglect? One cannot help but wonder how God viewed the appalling condition of neglect *then* and how he feels about this similar inexcusable condition of disregard *now*.

In the study of God's Word, one must look at the *then* as well as the *now*. Is it okay for Christians today to disregard the assembly? Was it wrong then? Is it right now? Although in the present day, there is an unlike set of circumstances from the first century, at least in America, nevertheless, one wonders why it is okay for God's children to treat the assembly with so much lack of concern. It is time that everyone reexamines his/her own life to see if he/she is obedient to the teachings of God. Even

though Christians do not in this country suffer persecution, Christians are ignoring the Sunday morning assembly. It is not uncommon for believers today to use Sunday as a day to make weekend trips to visit relatives, to participate in sport activities, to take pleasure visits to the beach, to go fishing, to work in their place of employment, and so on.

Is there a reason why God's people should pay no attention to the fellowship on Sunday? Has God arbitrarily demanded His people to meet together just to convene for the sake of saying, "well, we attended"? No doubt, the motive behind this admonition is to challenge consistent involvement in the life of the church. Is this one of the means whereby individuals "draw near to God" (**Hebrews 10:22**)?^[1] Today, it is not uncommon for some Christians to withdraw from the local congregation because someone hurt his/her feelings. Some husbands or wives neglect the assembly because their spouses do not want them to attend. Some do not attend because they find the interest of this age more pressing than the things of the age to come. Paul speaks of Demas as one who felt the needs of the present order more pressing than the things of God. In the last letter that Paul wrote, he bemoaned this tragedy in Demas's life; he writes:

Do your best to come to me quickly,¹⁰ for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.¹¹ Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.¹² I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.¹³ When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments (**2 Timothy 4:9-13**).

Earlier, Paul had written to the church at Colossae (60 CE) with greetings from Demas (**Colossians 4:14**). Demas was also listed in his letter to **Philemon (v. 24)**. But, approximately six to seven years later, one discovers that Paul calls attention to a change of priorities in the life of Demas. What does it mean to say that Demas "loved this world"? One would be hard pressed to say that Demas left the faith and went off into deep sin. He no doubt had the experience that many Christians experience today. He allowed some of the things of the world to creep into his life and replace the love of God. He started putting other activities between himself and his service for Jesus Christ. Are you like Demas? Paul does not spell out in clear details the tug of war going on within the life of Demas, but, on the other hand, Christians can use this text to examine his/her own life with the Lord Jesus. Are you neglecting Bible reading? Are you neglecting daily prayer? Are you unfaithful to the services at Oakwood Hills Church? Are you careless about visiting those who are absent? Are you so wrapped up in material things that you have no time for God? Again, have you put other activities between you and God?

One can hardly read Paul's statement to Timothy about Demas without recalling the words of John as he sought to combat a form of worldliness. Listen to John as he exhorts his readers:

¹⁵ Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For everything in the world—the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has

and does—comes not from the Father but from the world. ¹⁷ The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever (**1 John 2:15-17**).

One cannot read these verses without immediate consciousness that every believer is confronted with two choices. One either loves the Father or else one loves the world. John does not want the saints to fall into spiritual duplicity, that is to say, exhibiting spiritual things while the heart is overcome by the world.^[2] What is foremost in your mind? Are you more concerned about spiritual things or material things? Believers need each other's fellowship. Christians need to face their great responsibilities in their daily walk with God. Industry pressures, domestic pressures, community pressures, financial pressures, amusement pressures, and material pressures all militate against our being present at the gatherings of God's people. Believers must refuse to go along with anything that would lure them away from this get-together. Many Christians start off with a big bang. They start off living for the Lord. They start off with burning zeal. They read their Bibles every day. They pray daily. They attend every service of the church. But then something happens—they become lukewarm. Other activities take precedence over spiritual things. It is no longer the practice of many of God's people to meet regularly on the Lord's Day. Why?—Lukewarmness. What does the kingdom of God mean to you? Are you truly a seeker after the righteousness of God? Are you concerned about every thing except the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Jesus, in His Sermon on the Mount, calls attention to the necessity of seeking God first in all of one's priorities in life:

“And why do you worry about clothes? See how the lilies of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (**Matthew 6:28-34**).

Luke also gives a rather interesting account in Jesus' ministry. In this account he records that Jesus attended a synagogue service on a Sabbath day. Was this something unique in His life? Was this something that just occasionally happened? Luke informs Theophilus that the Sabbath gathering was not just an occasional event in the life of Jesus, but rather it was his custom to do this on the Sabbath. Take note to Luke's written account as he tells how Jesus returned to go Galilee and preached in the synagogues. On His arrival at Nazareth, one observes Jesus going into the synagogue and reading from the prophet Isaiah.

Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. ¹⁵ He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. ¹⁶ He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom.

And he stood up to read.¹⁷ The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:¹⁸ “**The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed,**¹⁹ **to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.**”²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him,²¹ and he began by saying to them, “**Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing**” (**Luke 4:14-20**).

It was Jesus’ custom to attend the public gatherings of God’s people, a custom that His followers would continue to practice (**Hebrews 10:24-25**). One might argue that the system was corrupt, or one might argue that Jesus did not need instruction. Still, our Lord made His way on the Sabbath to the place of prayer and to the place where the Law and the Prophets were read. The synagogue services opened with an invocation for God’s blessings, the *Shema* (the traditional confession of faith—**Deuteronomy 6:4-9**), the prescribed readings from the Law and from the Prophets. Following the readings, which were read in Hebrew and then translated into Aramaic, one would then make comments upon the readings, which Jesus did.^[3] This was not an uncommon practice. Generally a sermon followed the reading of the Law and the Prophets. Luke records that both Paul and Barnabas observed this custom of Sabbath meeting:

From Perga they went on to Pisidian Antioch. On the Sabbath they entered the synagogue and sat down.¹⁵ After the reading from the Law and the Prophets, the synagogue rulers sent word to them, saying, “Brothers, if you have a message of encouragement for the people, please speak.”¹⁶ Standing up, Paul motioned with his hand and said: “Men of Israel and you Gentiles who worship God, listen to me! (**Acts 13:14-16**).

William Barclay calls attention to the fact that there were seven people who read.^[4] One also observes the reading of Scripture in the Christian assemblies. Paul, in his letter to the Christians at Colossae, exhorted the believers to read his writings: “After this letter has been read to you, see that it is also read in the church of the Laodiceans and that you in turn read the letter from Laodicea” (**Colossians 4:16**). As one reflects upon the assembly, one can hardly fail to recall the words of Jesus to His disciples: “**For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them**” (**Matthew 18:20**). Even though Jesus is not present in a visible form, nevertheless, He is still present—although invisible—in the midst of His disciples. He is present in the assembly of His people. Yes, Jesus is in the sphere of the Church. He is as much present in the little congregation as He is in the big congregations. He is present in Bible Study Groups; He is present in Prayer Meetings. How wonderful to know that the risen Christ of Calvary gathers with His people—whether they be many or few.

The church is so important that Jesus purchased the church with His blood (**Acts 20:28**). Again, the Lord added to the church daily such as were being saved (**Acts 2:47**). How do you feel about the church of Jesus? What is your custom on

Sundays? Where is your interest? Is it in material objects or is it in spiritual things? Are you laying up for yourselves treasures in heaven? Where is your heart? Is it divided? Listen to Jesus once more in the Sermon on the Mount:

¹⁹ “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. ²² “The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. ²³ But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! ²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money (Matthew 6:19-24).

Where is your devotion? Are you storing up treasures in heaven? As one reflects upon these words of Jesus, one should also reflect upon the story of Martha and Mary. Are you a Martha or a Mary? Which! This story illustrates the differences in priorities between the two sisters. Luke reports this incident in his Gospel:

As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord’s feet listening to what he said. ⁴⁰ But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, “Lord, don’t you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!” ⁴¹ “Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you are worried and upset about many things, ⁴² but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38-42).

Which one of the sisters do you relate to? When Christians assemble, one expects to listen to an explanation of the Word of God. Christians are exhorted not to give up the habit of meeting together as some were doing (**Hebrews 10:25**). How do you feel about this passage of Scripture? Are you willing to obey this injunction? Are you like Pharaoh: “Who is the LORD, that I should obey him” (**Exodus 5:2**). How do your actions speak? Do you neglect the Sunday assembly? Do you reject Bible reading? Do you neglect prayers? Just what is the course of your life? Are you on the Lord’s side? Do you gather with Him on Sundays?

The public assemblies of God’s people should be joyous occasions for every believer. I can truthfully say that it is like heaven upon earth to me. My heart often burns within me as I listen to the prayers and hear the singing. As I listen to the Word, my heart leaps for joy. It is true that everyone needs his/her quiet time with the Lord, but it is also true that every believer needs the fellowship of other believers. As long as God gives me health, I will meet with His people to pray together, to sing together, to break bread together, to study God’s Word together, and to encourage one another together. Do you still remember your first love for God? Do you remember your zeal for the things of God in your conversion? Has your zeal flickered out like a wick on a

candle? Apathy is a trait that permeates every body of believers. In fact, Paul wrote to the Christians at Rome with the following admonition: “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord” (**Romans 12:11**). Are you zealous for God? Yes, there is orthodoxy, but is there zeal for the things of God? Christianity, for many, has degenerated into a kind of formality. The church in Laodicea is a classic example of lack of interest (**Revelation 3:14-22**)

CONCLUSION

Can one know more about Christ and remain in a state of lethargy? When one truly knows Christ, I cannot think it possible for one to lack zeal. If people knew more about Jesus, it does not seem possible for sluggishness to abound. Are you willing to vow revenge against your laziness? Are you willing to vow revenge against your failure to meet with the people of God? Are you willing to vow revenge against your lack of love for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Why don't we love one another more? Is it because we don't love the Savior, as we ought? Why don't we meet regularly with the saints on Sunday morning? Is it because we don't love the Savior, as we ought? Why don't we read the Bible regularly? Is it because we don't love the Savior, as we ought? Why don't we pray often? Is it because we don't love the Savior, as we ought?

I cannot speak for you as to your motives; I can only speak for myself. My objective in this message is not to tear anyone down, but rather to build up. I want to remind God's people of God's mercy. When one gathers with the saints on the Lord's Day, one partakes of the memorial that God has given to His people—the Lord's Supper. In this memorial, one is reminded of His forgiveness for the penitent soul. As Christians assemble from week to week to commemorate the Lord's Supper, one's mind reflects upon “plenteous redemption,” which is ever before the conscience of every individual. This divine act of mercy is ever before the people of God in the Lord's Supper. Sunday is a time of reflection and a time of encouragement. In conclusion, Paul's words to the Corinthians seem appropriate for this study:

Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test? ⁶ And I trust that you will discover that we have not failed the test. ⁷ Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong. Not that people will see that we have stood the test but that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. ⁸ For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. ⁹ We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is for your perfection. ¹⁰ This is why I write these things when I am absent, that when I come I may not have to be harsh in my use of authority—the authority the Lord gave me for building you up, not for tearing you down (**2 Corinthians 13:5-10**).

^[1] All Scripture citations are from *The New International Version*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House) 1984, unless stated otherwise.

^[2] See Gary M. Burge, *Letters of John*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 114, for an excellent commentary on 1 John 2:15-17.

^[3] See Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 136.

^[4] William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke*, The Daily Study Bible Study Series, Revised Edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), 46.